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ROULEZ TAMBOURS . . .

Who, amongst our compatriots, does not know that fiery and inspiring song of our French-speaking compatriots, which has long ago become the common property of our Nation. This patriotic song is celebrating its 92nd birthday anniversary, and it is well worth remembering, when, and under what circumstances this martial tune first saw the light of day.

"Roulez Tambours" . . . originated during the Neuchâtel dispute in 1856-57, which not only created a great stir in Switzerland, but throughout Europe. — In contrast to the other 21 cantons, which constituted the Swiss Confederation, and which were without exception of a purely republic character, the canton of Neuchâtel, which entered the Confederation in 1815, was still a principality under foreign jurisdiction. The King of Prussia was in fact called amongst his other titles, Prince of Neuchâtel and Count of Vallangin. When a hundred years ago the regeneration movement swept away all reactionary governments in most of the cantons, the republicans in the canton of Neuchâtel revolted against its rulers, but the revolution was put down by force. The small but active republican party did not lose heart; the discontent with the representatives of the royal dynasty grew rapidly, and many adherents were won over in various parts of the Jura.

During the great and far reaching political events of 1847 and 1848 a new and vigorous revolution broke out, and the Government was promptly chased over the boundary. A new constitution was proclaimed, which was more in keeping with the one of the Swiss Confederation. Prussia, which at the time, had its own troubles, seemed to take but little notice of the happenings, treating the matter very contemptuously; but nine years after this event, the royalist party, under the leadership of Colonel de Pourtalès, tried to reinstate the old régime. In the night of the 2nd to the 3rd of September, his troops stormed the Castle and took possession of the town of Neuchâtel. The republican Government was arrested, and put under lock and key; but already the following day the republican forces under the command of Colonel Denzler, recaptured the Castle. Eight royalists were killed, 26 wounded and 480 made prisoners. The King of Prussia at once demanded that all prisoners should be set free, and made other demands, asserting his rights over the principality of Neuchâtel. His demands were couched in such language that no self-respecting country could enter even into preliminary negotiations and war seemed to be inevitable.

On January 2nd, the Prussian Army received marching orders, the South German States having granted free passage to the King's forces. A wave of war enthusiasm swept over the whole of Switzerland, the whole population stood like one man behind the Federal Council, volunteers flocked to the colours from all parts of the country. On December 30th Parliament unanimously elected General Dufour commander in chief of the Federal forces. He assembled at once an army of 30,000 men and threw them on the threatened frontier. Extensive fortifications were erected, all the Rhein bridges were fortified, Schaffhausen and Eglisau were transformed into fortresses and the steamers on the Lake of Constanze were armed with guns. The entourage of Klein Basel was fortified and manned with heavy artillery, 78 pieces in all.

General Dufour's plan was, to be on the defence at Basle, whilst his forces were to attack the Prussians at Schaffhausen. It was in these days of national enthusiasm, that Amiel's song :

Roulez tambours, pour couvrir la frontière,
Aux bords du Rhin, guidez nous au combat.

was first sung by our French-speaking compatriots.

Diplomatic relations between Prussia and the Confederation were broken off, when some of the other Powers made it known that they disapproved of a settlement of the dispute by armed force. France intimated, that, should Prussia cross the frontier, they would at once occupy the cantons of Neuchâtel and Geneva, and Austria would do the same with the cantons of Ticino and Grison. In order to avert these dangers, negotiations were started, after Switzerland had agreed to release the royalist prisoners, on condition that they left the country until the dispute was settled. On March the 5th, 1857, the plenipotentiaries of France, Austria, England and Russia assembled in Paris and agreed on terms which were put before the two belligerents. The Swiss Parliament accepted these terms on the 11th and 12th of June, and the King of Prussia made his acceptance of the conditions known on the 19th of the same month. The latter, however, only agreed to the terms after Napoleon and the Government of Great Britain had put some considerable pressure on him. Switzerland had every reason to be satisfied with the settlement. The King of Prussia renounced all rights over the Principality of Neuchâtel and the canton of Neuchâtel was declared an independent canton of the Swiss Confederation. Switzerland had to bear the costs of the September events, and agreed not to prosecute any of the participants who had taken part in the rising. The only souvenir Switzerland inherited from this "bloodless war" was that striking song: "Roulez Tambours" . . .

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